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Political Parties and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

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Abstract

As key agents of conflict management, political parties should play a critical role in peacebuilding. But despite a widespread consensus on the importance of parties for both political and economic development, international interventions in post-conflict states often have the effect of undermining, rather than promoting, the development of strong parties and stable party systems. While both the scholarly literature and much domestic political practice favour the development of aggregative and nationally focused parties, international post-conflict peacebuilding efforts – particularly cases where the United Nations is involved – often privilege descriptive representation and inclusion over other goals, resulting in fragmented and ethnically based party systems. This neglect of systemic party-building has contributed to extreme political sclerosis in recent high-profile international interventions such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Nepal, amongst others.

As key agents of both political development and conflict management, political parties should play a critical role in post-conflict peacebuilding. However, despite a widespread scholarly consensus on the importance of programmatic political parties for both political and economic development, I argue in this article that contemporary international interventions to promote democracy in post-conflict states often have the effect of undermining, rather than promoting, the development of strong parties and stable party systems.

In this article, I pursue three approaches to examining this policy dilemma. First, I take an *institutional* approach, looking at some of the more innovative attempts around the world to try to build more aggregative and nationally focused political parties. The distinctive aspect here is that I focus not just on post-conflict countries but also on a potentially more important control group – those countries which have not become as conflict-prone as many expected, such as Indonesia.

Second, I utilise some of the most interesting current work coming out of *political economy*, which highlights the role of programmatic political parties as institutions which can help to solve collective action problems and deliver credible commitments. Again, these very qualities tend to be in particularly short supply in many post-conflict countries. Hence, I argue that the institutional economics literature on programmatic parties has great potential relevance for questions of post-conflict peacebuilding.

Finally, I turn to the *empirical* story, looking at international approaches to post-conflict democracy and party-building. I argue that the prevailing international practice, particularly in cases where the United Nations is heavily involved, tends to prioritise descriptive representation and inclusion over other goals such as governability and accountability, resulting in weak, fragmented and often ethnically based party systems. This neglect of systemic party-building has contributed to extreme political sclerosis in recent high-profile international interventions such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Nepal, amongst others.

Introduction

Political parties are essential components of representative democracy, and it is difficult to imagine how the governance of modern states could be accomplished without meaningful political parties. By organising voters, aggregating and articulating interests, crafting policy alternatives and providing the basis for coordinated electoral and legislative activity, political parties are not just central to representative government, but also to the process of democratic development in transitional democracies.¹

Parties perform a number of essential functions that make democracy possible. Ideally, they represent political constituencies and interests, recruit and socialise new candidates for office, set policymaking agendas, integrate disparate groups and individuals into the democratic process, and form the basis of stable political coalitions and hence governments. Collectively, this means that political parties are one of the primary avenues for building an accountable and responsive model of democracy.

Beyond these functional activities, parties also provide a number of deeper, systemic supports that help make democracy work effectively. For instance, they mediate between the demands of the citizenry and the actions of the government, aggregating the diverse demands of the electorate into coherent public policy, and making effective collective action possible within legislatures. Without the predictable voting coalitions that parliamentary parties provide, there would be chaos as legislative majorities shifted from issue to issue and vote to vote.

Yet in many countries, particularly post-conflict ones, political parties struggle to play these admittedly idealised roles. Instead, parties exhibit a range of pathologies that undercut their ability to deliver the kind of systemic benefits on which representative politics depends. In reality, parties in transitional environments are often poorly institutionalised or based around narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting society as a whole. They are typically organisationally thin, coming to life only at election time, with little in the way of a coherent ideology or policy agenda. They are frequently unable to ensure disciplined collective action in parliament, with members shifting between parties. As a result, parties often struggle to manage social conflicts and fail to deliver public goods and promote development.

Parties and post-conflict governance

Political parties' importance is heightened in countries attempting to make the transition from the chaos of violent conflict to democratic government. In post-conflict or divided societies, ethnic and other communal identities are often a predominant social cleavage, providing a kind of social glue when other civic bonds have been destroyed. Those few civil society organisations that exist are often closely associated with conflict actors (e.g. ethnic associations, religious bodies, veterans groups, etc.), often through direct patron–client exchanges. As a result, politics tends to be both highly personalised and strongly identity-based around whatever cleavages – tribe, language, region or religion – are most salient. In such cases, the interaction between civil society, political parties and the

electoral process can become highly fraught, as demonstrated in cases such as Kenya where flawed elections catalysed large-scale ethnic violence in 2007.²

The recognition of such impediments to democratic development has spurred growing attention, both at the domestic and international level, on how more broad-based political parties can be sustained and developed in socially complex environments. Internationally, the response by Western governments to this problem has been a plethora of political party assistance programs which seek to help parties become stronger, more coherent and inclusive organisations – that is, more like the idealised view of how parties are supposed to operate. These programs have received considerable funding from donor agencies and generated a swathe of bodies devoted to political party assistance. Post-conflict states such as Mozambique, Kosovo and Afghanistan have been the recipients of large-scale party-building operations designed to transform former armed groups into electoral organisations which respect constitutional boundaries.³ As a result of this increasing focus on parties at both the domestic and international level, the importance of political parties to post-conflict democracy receives more attention today than ever before.⁴

But evaluations suggest that these assistance programs typically have a limited impact, rarely if ever transforming the fundamental organisational and operational characteristics of recipient parties.⁵ The indiscriminate way in which assistance is offered and the lack of any overarching consensus on what kinds of parties and party systems should be encouraged represents a particular weakness of contemporary party assistance. Post-conflict democracy promotion too often becomes hostage to facile ideas about the virtues of unconstrained party system development – a policy of ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’. While superficially attractive, this has led to a proliferation of new parties in transitional democracies, often based around narrow identity criteria, and a dearth of the kind of broad-based, aggregative parties that, studies suggest, can bind together societies and promote economic development.

This disjuncture is even more striking, given the way political elites in conflict-prone countries which have *not* attracted international interventions have tended to deal with their own issues of internal party system development. In sharp contrast to international dictates, domestic elites frequently seek

to limit party proliferation, combat sectarianism and regulate the way parties form, organise and compete.⁶ For instance, many emerging democracies attempt to restrict ethnic or religiously based parties, up to and including banning them outright.⁷ Others use formal or informal multiethnic coalitions of ethnic parties, such as the *Barisan Nasional* umbrella in Malaysia which brings together separate parties representing the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities.⁸ Many emerging democracies use electoral reforms to shape the development of their party systems, and some have also introduced rules governing voting in parliament as well, in an attempt to ensure greater party discipline.⁹

These efforts to build more coherent, and less fragmented, parties can draw on considerable support from the scholarly literature. In his classic work on political change, for example, Samuel Huntington argued that strong parties are ‘the prerequisite for political stability in modernising countries’.¹⁰ Three leading scholars of democracy, Juan Linz, Larry Diamond and Seymour Martin Lipset, bluntly stated that ‘without effective parties that command at least somewhat stable bases of support, democracies cannot have effective governance’¹¹. Separately, in one of his final publications, Lipset extolled the ‘indispensability of political parties’ for the survival of both emerging and established democracies.¹²

Empirical studies on the relationship between political parties and country governance have buttressed these conclusions. The most sophisticated effort, by Kenneth Janda and Jin-Young Kwak, concluded that one-third to half of all the variation in governance outcomes between states could be explained by how competitive, aggregative and stable was their party system¹³. Conversely, fragmented party systems seem debilitating for good governance: Powell's work on democratic durability suggests that the most favourable party system comprised a limited number of cohesive and broad-based parties, rather than many small, fragmented, personalised or ethnically based parties.¹⁴

Public goods delivery is a key part of this story, with nationally focussed parties more likely to deliver classic public goods such as health services¹⁵. Cross-nationally, an increase in the number of parties represented in the legislature leads to a higher spending by the government on subsidies and transfers but lower spending on public goods.¹⁶ A lack of nationalised parties can also be conflict-enhancing. According to large-N research by Dawn Brancati, regional parties tend to increase ethnic conflict and

secessionism by reinforcing ethnic and regional identities, producing legislation that favours certain groups over others, and mobilising groups to engage in ethnic conflict and secessionism.¹⁷

Broad-based party systems have also been identified as important factors supporting economic reform in fragile states. Haggard and Kaufman, for instance, found that 'the way party systems aggregated the preferences of competing economic interests' had a direct impact on the political economy of democratic transitions, noting that while moderate catch-all party systems appeared to facilitate preference aggregation, fragmented and polarised party systems constituted a particular barrier to reform¹⁸. However, this is not an inevitable outcome. European experience illustrates several example nations adapting to new realities of party fragmentation by developing accommodative practices.¹⁹

Where political competition is diffused by multiparty competition across the political spectrum, with no central governing or opposition party to structure political choice, citizens and political elites alike have to adapt to the reality of fragmenting political interests or face repeated rounds of instability and governmental underperformance.²⁰

Regardless of sheer numbers, the presence of parties that are both *institutionalised* and *programmatic* seems to be particularly important for democracy work effectively, enabling politicians to make credible election promises and electorates to retrospectively punish those who fail to deliver.²¹ By mobilising the aggregate interests of individuals with similar preferences, such parties also facilitate collective action – one of the keys to both economic and political development, as it allows citizens to act collectively in defence of their joint interests and to retrospectively reward or punish governing parties accordingly. Where citizens have this ability, governments have greater incentives to pursue public policies in the public interest and also face greater political costs if they fail.²²

But while both political practitioners and political scientists agree on the virtues of stable and programmatic political parties for emerging and consolidated democracies alike, they offer surprisingly little advice as to how such party systems may be encouraged or promoted. There are several reasons for this.

First, parties have typically been viewed as social phenomena beyond the scope of deliberate institutional design. Because political parties in theory represent the political expression of underlying societal cleavages, parties and party systems have not usually been thought amenable to overt political engineering.²³ While some authoritarian states have attempted to control the development of their party systems (e.g. the mandated ‘two-party’ or ‘three-party’ systems that existed under military rule in Nigeria and Indonesia, or the ‘no-party’ system recently abandoned in Uganda), most democracies allow parties to develop relatively freely. Because of this, parties have until recently remained beyond the reach of formal political engineering in most circumstances.

The role of international actors and development aid agencies is also important. While it is today widely accepted that stable democracy requires the development of a stable party system, there had in the past been resistance to the idea of direct international assistance to parties. Until recently, broader democracy and governance initiatives funded by development aid agencies often steered clear of working with parties, in part because of the overtly ‘political’ nature of such work, and also because aid agencies were often more comfortable dealing with civil society. But there has been a considerable shift in international practice in the past decade, with more and more governments and international organisations including political party strengthening in their development assistance programs.²⁴

If we know that they are desirable, the next question must surely be how stable and aggregative parties and party systems can be encouraged to develop. Clearly, forging a cohesive party system, particularly in societies riven by deep communal cleavages, is easier said than done. Nonetheless, domestic attempts to influence the development of parties via various kinds of institutional design have become relatively common in new democracies. The following section examines some of these domestic responses to the problem of party-building in conflict-prone societies.

Institutional Choices and Political Party Development

The most common means of influencing party system development in conflict-prone societies is to introduce regulations which govern their formation, registration and behaviour. Such regulations may require parties to demonstrate a cross-regional or nation-wide composition as a pre-condition for competing in elections. Some of the world's most important transitional states have introduced such measures in recent years. In Turkey, for example, parties must establish regional branches, hold regular conventions and field candidates in at least half of all provinces to be eligible to contest national elections. In Russia, one of Putin's first reforms required political parties to register regional branches in a majority of Russia's 89 regions. Nigeria, in a move followed by many other African countries, requires parties to display a 'federal character', and regularly bans parties that fail to meet this criterion.²⁵ In Indonesia, the world's most populous emerging democracy and largest Muslim country, parties must establish an organisational network in two-thirds of the provinces across the archipelago, and in two-thirds of the municipalities within those provinces, before they can compete in elections, although with some exceptions.²⁶ Such devices raise the costs of party organisation, erecting a steep barrier to any potential new entrants.

What is the effect of such schemes? The evidence to date is somewhat ambiguous, pointing to the utility of such mechanisms in achieving some goals – such as a more consolidated party system – but also their propensity for unintended consequences. Indonesia's mixture of regional (in Aceh) and national parties has worked relatively well, highlighting the reality that regional autonomy requires local electors to be able to vote for local parties. Johanna Birnir's analysis of Latin America's cross-regional party registration rules found that nationally oriented parties often prospered at the expense of those representing geographically concentrated indigenous groups, suggesting that the exclusionary effects of such rules may outweigh any gains that result from reduction in party fragmentation²⁷. In Africa, the most comprehensive study of this issue yet conducted found few clear impacts of ethnic party bans on either peace or democracy²⁸. In both regions, the claims that party engineering could promote better governance outcomes were found wanting.

In Asia, by contrast, party regulation appears to have been much more consequential.²⁹ I have argued previously that political party engineering in Asia and the Pacific has helped to consolidate party systems and promote a degree of conflict management, but in doing so has also assisted larger incumbent parties at the expense of minority interests.³⁰ In Indonesia, for instance, new party rules have deterred the emergence of ethno-regional parties and limited opportunities for secessionism and ethnic conflict. As Aspinall has noted,

In Indonesia, the decision early in the democratic transition to disallow local political parties from contesting elections was, it now appears in retrospect, highly consequential. It meant that the elevated levels of ethnic identification in politics that accompanied the transition were not crystallised, captured, and perpetuated in political movements that themselves sought to seek state power. At the very least, the decision placed an additional layer of brokerage and negotiation between ethnic leaders and state institutions. Indonesia's national political parties, though derided as poorly institutionalised vehicles of oligarchic interest, have proven remarkably adept at encouraging cross-ethnic bargaining and in minimising the role of ethnicity in politics.³¹

Despite its apparent success, the Indonesian experience has not so far inspired much in the way of emulation. One reason may be the heavy-handed nature of such reforms, which necessarily impinge on political freedom. In one sign of this, Fiji's military government recently issued a decree requiring parties to recruit at least 5000 registered members divided between the country's four geographic divisions, a move which may force some degree of multiethnic behaviour but which also raises huge barriers to democracy, requiring parties to enlist almost 10 per cent of the country's population as registered members.³²

Nonetheless, an increasing number of new democracies, particularly in post-conflict societies, have attempted to shape the development of their party system by other means. One approach is to encourage multi-ethnicity within parties by deliberately manipulating the ethnic composition of candidate lists, as in South Africa. In some countries, this has been taken further to include a

legislative requirement for multi-ethnicity that would have been unlikely to develop otherwise. In Singapore, for example, all parties contesting the 15 'Group Representation Constituencies' must include a member of the Malay, Indian or some other minority community on their list, thus ensuring a (modest) degree of multi-ethnicity. A related approach has been used for some time in Lebanon, which requires a balance of different confessional groups in each electoral district, although there the ultimate composition of the party lists rests with the voters. Similarly, in Latin America, Nicaragua and Peruoblige parties open up space on their lists for indigenous candidates at local and, in some cases, national elections.³³

Another approach has been to use technical electoral barriers such as vote thresholds, which prevent the election of many small parties in parliament. Probably the most extreme application of this is in Turkey, where parties must attain at least 10 per cent of the national vote (and constituency-level thresholds also apply) before they can be represented in parliament, thus discriminating strongly against smaller parties, especially those with geographically concentrated support bases.³⁴ Like the Indonesian rules, this raises the fixed costs for all parties and has led to some extreme vote distortions: at the 2002 election, so many smaller parties failed to clear the 10 per cent threshold that 46 per cent of all votes were effectively 'wasted'.³⁵ In Latin America, all countries bar Argentina and Brazil require parties to win a minimum share of the vote at parliamentary elections, ranging from 500 votes in Uruguay to 5 per cent of all votes in Ecuador.³⁶ In Asia, electoral thresholds have become a source of increasing political dispute, with emerging democracies such as Thailand and Indonesia lifting thresholds as a means of deterring smaller parties.³⁷

Other, more complex electoral system innovations to counter party fractionalisation and encourage inter-party cooperation are possible. For instance, vote-pooling systems in which electors rank-order candidates, and in which votes are transferred according to these rankings, can have the effect of rewarding centrists over extremists and encouraging cross-party cooperation by making politicians from different parties reciprocally dependent on transfer votes from their rivals.³⁸ Examples of such systems in conflict-prone societies include the single transferable vote system in Northern Ireland, and the alternative vote models adopted in both Fiji and Papua New Guinea (and also recommended for

Tonga and the Solomon Islands) in recent years. While the success of such reforms has been mixed, in each case encouraging the development of a more aggregative party system was a primary goal.³⁹

A final option for promoting cross-ethnic parties is to introduce distribution requirements which require parties or candidates to garner specified support levels across different regions of a country, rather than just their own home base, in order to be elected. First introduced in Nigeria in 1979, distribution requirements have so far been applied to presidential elections in large, ethnically diverse states in order to ensure that winning candidates receive a sufficiently broad spread of votes, rather than drawing their support from a few regions only. Nigeria's rules, which require presidential candidates to win both a majority of the overall vote and at least 25 per cent in two-thirds of Nigeria's 36 states have proved consequential. In 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner, was re-elected (in what was hailed as the cleanest presidential vote in the country's history) with more than a quarter of the vote in 31 states, with an impressive showing in the predominantly Muslim north. Similarly, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono easily surpassed Indonesia's cross-archipelago support floor of at least 20 per cent of the vote in half of all provinces at his landslide 2009 electoral victory. Both candidates were able to demonstrate cross-regional appeal in what are very diverse and at times conflict-prone societies.

Party-building and international practice

In contrast to these kinds of devices, elections in which the international community is heavily involved – particularly those conducted under United Nations auspices – display few if any such incentives for political aggregation. Instead, they tend to favour simple models of proportional representation and unconstrained party formation, a combination which facilitates minority inclusion but poses major challenges for post-conflict governance. Virtually all the major post-conflict elections since the end of the Cold War – including Namibia (1989), Nicaragua (1990), Cambodia (1993), South Africa (1994), Mozambique (1994), Liberia (1997), Bosnia (1996), Kosovo (2001), East Timor (2001), Iraq (2005), Burundi (2005), Rwanda (2008) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (2006) –

have used some form of party-list proportional representation (PR), sometimes with the entire country forming a single electoral district. This model has some very clear advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, PR can play an important role in ensuring inclusion and sharing of power between different groups once in government. On the other hand, because large-district PR systems allow both minority and majority parties to form and compete freely, they often feature parties which are ethnically based or thinly veiled versions of former warring armies.

But, irrespective of these political strengths and weaknesses, in practice the adoption of PR systems for UN-administered elections has frequently been dictated more by technical concerns, such as the desire to avoid demarcating individual electoral districts and producing separate ballot papers, than deeper issues of political development. In war-torn environments, national PR systems are sometimes argued to be the only feasible way to hold credible elections. The reasons for this are essentially administrative in nature: national party-list systems enable a uniform national ballot to be used, do not require electoral districts to be demarcated and greatly simplify the process of voter registration, vote counting and the calculation of results. Problems of population displacement and the lack of accurate census data also work in favour of a proportional system with a single national constituency which does not tie voters to specific electoral districts.⁴⁰

The problem with this approach is that such systems also have very specific political effects, particularly on a country's emerging party system. As one recent survey noted, nationwide PR is 'the most permissive system ... politicians can join small parties, establish new ones, or split an existing one, safe in the knowledge that even a small percentage of the votes will bring some seats in the legislative assembly. For the same reason, voters feel safe to vote for such parties, and their votes make the minimal success of small parties a sort of self-fulfilling expectation'.⁴¹ The result is often a fragmentation of existing parties and a multiplication of many smaller ones, particularly in the kind of fragmented conditions common to post-conflict societies.

Compounding this problem, large-district PR systems necessarily provide little geographic link between voters and their representatives, creating problems of political accountability and responsiveness. Many new democracies – particularly those in agrarian societies – have much higher

demands for constituency service at the local level than they do for representation of all shades of ideological opinion in the legislature.⁴² Yet, most PR systems undercut incentives for local representation and service delivery. Finally, as already discussed, highly proportional systems, such as that used at Iraq's transitional 2005 election, tend to encourage political fractionalisation rather than aggregation.

In Iraq, for this reason, international experts initially favoured an electoral system based around provincial boundaries. However, this would have entailed a lengthy national census. In the interests of time, it was therefore decided to fall back on a single, nationwide district elected by PR in which 1/275th of the vote was sufficient to gain a seat. While this doubtlessly facilitated the administration of the election itself, it also had the effect of fragmenting the legislature, marginalising numerically smaller groups such as the Sunni and doing nothing to prevent ethnic polarisation amongst the electorate. When combined with a presidential and quasi-federal system of government, the result was a proliferation of political veto-points which quickly led to deep problems of governability (stalemate, instability and balkanisation) and public policy (rent seeking, regional inequality and lack of public goods delivery) – all familiar and indeed predictable outcomes according to the political science literature.⁴³

In 2010, this system was replaced by a regional PR model along the lines of that initially recommended by external experts, enabling the resurgence of a nominally non-sectarian political party, Iraqiya, which included many Sunni politicians.⁴⁴ But by then, the die had been largely cast: most parties remained tied to ethnic and religious identities, with the Sunni-Shi'ite division the key political cleavage in Iraqi electoral politics. Compounding this problem was the powersharing arrangement between Iraq's two largest parties signed under US pressure in 2010, which rapidly degenerated into a bitter stand-off between the country's two most powerful politicians, prime minister Nuri al-Maliki and the leader of the Iraqiya bloc, Ayad Allawi. There is now a growing realisation that this ethicised political system was a repeat of mistakes made by US negotiators in Bosnia and elsewhere.⁴⁵ To quote Paul Salem of the Carnegie Endowment:

Because the U.S. is not familiar with deeply divided societies and is not familiar with power-sharing systems, I would say, it made many grave mistakes and made the situation much worse. In other words even in implementing a power-sharing system it didn't do it all the way and it didn't do it properly'.⁴⁶

In cases of international intervention, perhaps the worst decision in recent years was the choice of the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) for parliamentary elections in Afghanistan. Under SNTV, each elector has one vote, there are multiple seats to be elected and the candidates with the highest number of votes fill these positions. As a result, the number of candidates a party nominates becomes a critical choice: too few, and parties miss out on valuable chances to pick up additional seats; too many, and they risk splitting their vote too thinly and losing winnable seats. By forcing candidates from the same party to compete against each other for the same pool of voters, SNTV encourages personalistic attributes to be emphasised over and above those of party identification. While Afghanistan's weak and fragmented parliament probably suits the interests of President Karzai, these pathologies also undercut the goal of building a stronger political system and encouraging cohesive national development. In a clan-based society such as Afghanistan, SNTV has made it much harder for a consolidated party system to develop.⁴⁷

These examples suggest that successful transitional elections need to encourage both inclusion but also a significant degree of geographic and personal *accountability* – such as by having members of parliament represent territorially defined districts, or at least by allowing voters to choose between candidates and not just parties. For this reason, 'mixed' systems which deliver both district accountability and minority representation have become increasingly popular in recent years.

However, as the experience in 2006 of high-profile conflict-zone elections held under mixed systems in cases as varied as the Democratic Republic of Congo (which resulted in a highly fragmented parliament) and the Palestinian National Authority (in which the system was designed to favour the incumbent Fatah party but instead resulted in a victory for Hamas) indicates, there are no panaceas.

Despite this, most post-conflict political settlements give the responsibility for such choices to parties rather than to voters, approximating the classic consociational models of European social

democracies.⁴⁸ This tendency has buttressed the normative preferences of the United Nations and major donors for more inclusive political systems, evidenced by increasingly overt international attempts to increase the prospects of under-represented groups. Gender quotas are perhaps the best known example, either via reserved positions or formal party quotas for female candidates, both of which have become increasingly common in recent years. Countries as varied as Argentina, Bosnia, Costa Rica, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda have all dramatically increased their proportion of female parliamentarians via such methods.⁴⁹ In a similar vein, a small but growing number of post-conflict states are also pre-assigning seats for ethnic minorities either on party lists (as in the cases of Nigeria, Peru, Singapore mentioned earlier) or via reserved seats in parliament (as in Iraq, Bosnia, Lebanon and Kosovo), although the former approach remains less common than the latter.⁵⁰

However, the unhappy experience of government formation in these and other examples of communally structured political systems highlights a major problem: their tendency to become less and less governable, as the key aggregation functions of political parties are downplayed in favour of other normative goals such as inclusion and minority representation. Particularly in post-conflict societies, where the need to ensure that all key actors and groups involved in a conflict are represented in any political settlement is paramount, such concerns are easy to understand. But while understandable, it is becoming increasingly apparent that privileging representativeness over governability has led to perverse outcomes in a number of contemporary cases of post-conflict peacebuilding.

Consider, for example, the ongoing constitutional reform process in Nepal. Since 2006, following the collapse of the country's monarchy and a low-level civil war between Maoist rebels and a discredited government, the United Nations and other international donors have supported Nepal's constitutional reform process in the hope that it will produce a stable democratic system in what is a very poor, mountainous and diverse country. A key achievement to date has been the election of a very large and disparate Constitutional Assembly, whose membership is explicitly designed to represent the full diversity of Nepalese society, in contrast to the closed, elite-dominated politics of the past.

However, this highly inclusive process has made actually reaching agreement on a new constitution exceptionally slow and difficult, while highlighting the competing agendas of elected members and international donors. The country was without a Prime Minister for most of 2010, and at the time of writing it remains without a final constitution following the collapse of the Assembly in 2012. While the Maoists and some of the larger parties represented in the Assembly pushed for a constitution which emphasises unicameral majority rule and clear authority for the government, these priorities get short shrift from the donors, who have repeatedly called for greater attention to regionalism, gender balance, minority representation and the inclusion of civil society.⁵¹

While these are all significant issues, it could be argued that none are as important for a poor country such as Nepal as providing the basis for strong and effective government. Indeed, in different ways, each could be seen as undermining this goal. Regional devolution or federalism can have the effect of fragmenting already weak states, especially given plans for ethnically based state units.⁵² The preoccupation with descriptive representation of women and indigenous groups in the constitutional building process is at odds with the need to aggregate basic social cleavages of gender and ethnicity into effective parties. The prioritising of civil society could also have the perverse effect of undercutting efforts at party-building. Indeed, if donor wishes are followed, Nepal could end up with a system in which sectoral and minority representation is so privileged that it becomes almost impossible to govern. As one sign of this crisis of governability, on 28 May 2012, Nepal's Constituent Assembly ended its tenure, for the third and possibly final time, without having completed even a first draft of the constitution.

The recent history of Iraq gives another example of the kind of impasse which can be created when an array of ethno-religious parties need to arrive at a consensus to enshrine a new government: simply put, they do not. Today, some local observers argue that Iraq is veering towards a 'Lebanonisation' of its political system, with power permanently distributed along strict ethnic and sectarian lines. For two governments in a row, the posts of president, premier and parliament speaker have been parcelled out to a Kurd, a Shiite and a Sunni, all with deputies drawn from the other two groups, a practice that now appears to have spilled over into civil service appointments and the security forces.⁵³

Unsurprisingly, this sectarianisation of politics has led to acute political sclerosis. In October 2010, Iraq set what the *Washington Post* claimed was a new record for the country that had gone longest between holding parliamentary elections and forming a government, at over 208 days without a government.⁵⁴ The eventual formation of a powersharing government, under heavy US pressure, did little to solve the underlying problems of mistrust, as key parties repeatedly broke prior commitments to cooperate. Today, Iraq's government remains effectively paralysed, with analyst Kenneth M. Pollack noting that the national unity government 'took all of Iraq's political problems and put them into the government... There is widespread recognition now among American officials that inclusiveness over effectiveness was a mistake'.⁵⁵

The consequences of privileging inclusiveness over effectiveness can be seen in several other cases of post-conflict peacebuilding. Burundi – a recipient of much international donor attention – represents perhaps the apotheosis of this trend, with its parliament and other state agencies now constituted according to a fundamental 60/40 ethnic ratio between Hutu and Tutsi. Presidential candidates need a group of 200 qualified supporters reflecting 'ethnic and gender components' to support their nomination. Similarly, the country's two vice-presidents must hail from distinct ethnic backgrounds and party affiliations, while representing the dominant ethnic group within their party. For parliament to pass laws, a two-thirds majority (necessitating Tutsi votes, and thus a possible minority veto) is in place. Government formation is via a rigid model of mandated powersharing in which all parties obtaining more than 5 per cent of the vote are guaranteed ministerial positions, again with a fixed 60:40 Hutu–Tutsi composition. Similar provisions govern the make-up of the country's civil service, security forces and justice system (which also includes regional and gender equity requirements), as well as territorial powersharing. As Lemarchand has noted, 'No other state anywhere in the continent offers a more faithful image of the ideal consociational polity'⁵⁶. But, it is also a recipe for extreme political sclerosis and immobilism.

Conclusion

Building aggregative parties in post-conflict environments is fraught with problems. Even with the best will in the world, it has often proved impossible for party-builders to construct multiethnic parties. Difficult trade-offs are ever-present, not least the collective action problems created when internal party leaders attempt to balance the need for party cohesion and unity with the need to appeal to a broad swathe of the electorate. Parties need to form around whichever issues are salient, and in war-torn societies it is hard to escape the logic pushing parties to follow ‘conflict’ cleavages, be they inter-ethnic, inter-religious or inter-regional.

But, international actors can help or hinder this process. I believe that the preference for hyper-representative political architecture in some of the most prominent cases of post-conflict peacebuilding is a retrograde development. This trend has been encouraged to a significant degree by the United Nations and international donor agencies, and by elite concerns with issues of social exclusion, descriptive representation of women and minorities, and political representation more generally. While the normative preference of the international aid industry for inclusion and representation of all groups, especially women, is a laudable goal, it is less defensible when used as a donor-driven ‘natural experiment’ conducted upon aid-dependent new democracies. In addition to creating huge problems of day-to-day governance, this model risks producing a generation of weak politics and parties which are unable to take even routine political decisions, let alone difficult ones.

The implications of this paper therefore argue for a shift in international priorities in post-conflict democracy-building towards placing issues of effective governance and economic development at the forefront when decisions on political institutions and parties are taken. But what would such a pro-development representative democracy look like? The comparative literature suggests several desirable characteristics in terms of party politics.

First, post-conflict societies require political *stability* – both in terms of regime type and in terms of parties. While too much stability is the death knell of democracy, a more common problem in many emerging democracies is actually the reverse – what Tom Carothers has called ‘feckless pluralism’, in

which relatively free and fair elections result only in the alternation of power between corrupt, self-interested and ineffective political party elites who ‘seem only to trade the country's problems back and forth from one hapless side to the other’.⁵⁷ To counter this, well-institutionalised political parties with clear policy platforms are key, not least because of the quest for credible commitments. However, party institutionalisation in new democracies remains an elusive goal.⁵⁸

In terms of party systems, a relatively small number of broad-based, programmatic parties in which competition over the generation of public goods takes precedence over all other issues, need to be fostered and sustained. The natural tendency in post-conflict settings for a profusion of new parties representing different social cleavages should not be further exacerbated by permissive electoral laws. Rather, international assistance should aim to foster a few large, inclusive parties with a broad support base which deliberately cut across, rather than reinforce, existing social cleavages.

And finally, as a complement to this focus on developing a small number of broad-based, programmatic parties, there should be much less focus from external assistance on promoting descriptive representation and minority rights than is accorded in both democratic theory and donor practice. Rather, promoting ‘bridging’ parties which aggregate diverse social cleavages should take precedence over other goals aimed at maximising the representation of all interests, worthy though these may be.

As should now be clear, there is a clear tension between these recommendations and the typical concerns of aid donor agencies and international organisations. While the comparative experience strongly suggests that programmatic, aggregative and institutionalised parties offer major benefits for all democracies, this is even more important in post-conflict ones. But, when it comes to international efforts at party-building in post-conflict democracies, these objectives often in practice take a back seat to more immediate concerns about administrative convenience, descriptive representation and tokenism. Unsurprisingly, the result has been immobilised parliaments, fragmented parties and chronically unstable governments.

Notes

1. There is a large literature on the contribution of political parties to democratic functioning. Some of the most important works include Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York, NY: The Free Press 1967); Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1976); John Aldrich, *Why Parties?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1995); Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 1997); Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (eds) *Political Parties and Democracy* (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001); Russell Dalton, David Farrell and Ian McAllister, *Political Parties and Democratic Linkage: How Parties Organise Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011) and most recently Kenneth Janda and Jin-Young Kwak, *Party Systems and Country Governance* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers 2011).
2. Susanne D. Mueller, 'Dying to Win: Elections, Political Violence and Institutional Decay in Kenya' in David Gillies (ed.) *Elections in Dangerous Places: Democracy and the Paradoxes of Peacebuilding* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press 2011).
3. See Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, 'When Rebels Change Their Stripes: Armed Insurgents in Post-War Politics' in Anna Jarstad and Timothy Sisk (eds) *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 2008); and Jeroen De Zeeuw, *From Soldiers to Politicians: Transforming Rebel Movements After Civil War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 2007).
4. Benjamin Reilly and Per Nordlund (eds) *Political Parties in Conflict-Prone Societies: Regulation, Engineering and Democratic Development* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press 2008).
5. See Thomas Carothers, *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2006). See also Gero Erdman, 'Political Party Assistance and Political Party Research: Towards a Closer Encounter?', *Democratization* 17/6 (2010) pp.1275–96
6. Benjamin Reilly, 'Political Engineering and Party Politics in Conflict-Prone Societies', *Democratization* 13/5 (2006) pp.811–27.
7. The most comprehensive examination is Matthijs Bogaards, Matthias Basedau and Christof Hartmann (eds) 'Ethnic Party Bans in Africa', *Democratization* 17/4 (2010), special issue.
8. The opposition *Pakatan Rakyat* alliance follows a similar model, which offers some but not all the advantages of a single multiethnic party. See Donald L. Horowitz, 'Making Moderation Pay: the Comparative Politics of Ethnic Conflict Management' in J. V. Montville (ed.) *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (New York, NY: Lexington Books 1991).
9. For a recent survey see Norm Kelly and Sefakor Ashiagbor, 'Parliamentary Groups' in *Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspective* (Washington, DC: National Democratic Institute 2011).
10. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1968) p.412.
11. Larry Diamond, Juan Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Introduction: What Makes for Democracy?' in Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers 1995) p.34.
12. Seymour Martin Lipset, 'The Indispensability of Political Parties', *Journal of Democracy* 11/1 (2000) pp.48–55.
13. Janda and Kwak (note 1).

14. G. Bingham Powell, *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982) pp.99–108.
15. A. Hicken, K. Kollman, and J. Simmons, *Party System Nationalization and Public Goods Production*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, September 2007; A. Hicken, K. Kollman, and J. Simmons, *Party System Nationalization and the Provision of Public Health Services*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago IL, April 2008; and Joel Selway, 'Electoral Reform and Public Policy Outcomes in Thailand', *World Politics* 63/1 (2011) pp.165–202.
16. Bumba Mukherjee, 'Political Parties and the Size of Government in Multiparty Legislatures: Examining Cross-Country and Panel Data Evidence', *Comparative Political Studies* 36/6 (2003) pp.699–728.
17. Dawn Brancati, *Peace by Design: Managing Intrastate Conflict through Decentralization* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2009).
18. See Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1995) p.265.
19. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1977).
20. Russell Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004) p.206.
21. See Aldrich (note 1); Herbert P. Kitschelt, 'Party Systems' in Carles Boix and Susan Stokes (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007) and Philip Keefer, 'Programmatic Parties: Where Do They Come From and Do They Matter?' (Washington, DC: World Bank Working Paper 2005).
22. See Philip Keefer, 'Collective Action, Political Parties and Pro-Development Public Policy', *Policy Research Working Paper Series 5676* (Washington, DC: The World Bank 2011).
23. Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, 'Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction' in Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York, NY: Free Press 1967).
24. See Ivan Doherty, 'Democracy Out of Balance: Civil Society Can't Replace Political Parties', *Policy Review* April/May (2001) pp.25–35.
25. Matthijs Bogaards, 'Ethnic Party Bans and Institutional Engineering in Nigeria', *Democratization*, 17/4 (2010) pp.730–49.
26. An exception to this rule applies in Aceh, and was a key part of the 2005 peace agreement there. See Ben Hillman, 'Power-Sharing and Political Party Engineering in Conflict-Prone Societies: The Indonesian Experiment in Aceh', *Conflict, Security and Development* 12/2 (2012) pp.149—69.
27. Johanna Birnir, 'Party Regulation in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America: The Effect on Minority Representation and the Propensity for Conflict' in Reilly and Nordlund (note 4).
28. Anika Moroff and Matthias Basedau, 'An Effective Measure of Institutional Engineering? Ethnic Party Bans in Africa', *Democratization*, 17/4 (2010) pp.666–86.
29. See Allen Hicken, 'Political Engineering and Party Regulation in Southeast Asia' in Reilly and Nordlund (note 4).
30. See Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006).

31. Edward Aspinall, 'Democratization and Ethnic Politics in Indonesia: Nine Theses', *Journal of East Asian Studies* 11 (2011) p.311.
32. See 'Fiji Decree Restricts Political Participation', *The Australian* 16 Jan. 2013.
33. See Matthias Catón and Fernando Tuesta Soldevilla, 'Political Parties in Conflict-Prone Societies in Latin America' in Reilly and Nordlund (note 4).
34. Ergun Özbudun, 'The Institutional Decline of Parties in Turkey' in Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (eds) *Political Parties and Democracy* (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001).
35. Soli Özel, 'Turkey at the Polls: After the Tsunami,' *Journal of Democracy* 14/3 (2003) pp.80–94.
36. See Catón and Tuesta Soldevilla (note 33).
37. Reilly (note 6).
38. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1985).
39. See Reilly (note 6).
40. A point I discuss at more length in Benjamin Reilly, 'Post-Conflict Elections: Uncertain Turning Points of Transition?' in Jarstad and Sisk (note 3).
41. Rein Taagepera and Mads Qvortrup, 'Who Gets What, When, How – Through Which Electoral System?', *European Political Science* 10 (2011) p.8.
42. Joel Barkan, 'Elections in Agrarian Societies', *Journal of Democracy* 6/4 (1995) pp.106–16.
43. See, for example, Gary W. Cox and Matthew McCubbins, 'The Institutional Determinants of Economic Policy Outcomes' in Stephan Haggard and Mathew D. McCubbins (eds) *Presidents, Parliaments, and Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001).
44. See Toby Dodge, 'Back to the Future: The Failure to Reform the Post-War Political Economy of Iraq' in Mats Bersdal and Dominik Zaum (eds) *Political Economy of Statebuilding: Power After Peace* (New York, NY: Routledge 2012).
45. Lise Howard, *U.S. Foreign Policy, Ideational Path Dependence, and Ethno-Religious Civil Conflict*, Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, 2 Sep. 2010.
46. See Paul Salem, 'U.S. Leaves Behind a Sectarian Iraq', *USA Today* 22 Dec. 2011, online at < <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=46322&lang=ru>>.
47. Andrew Reynolds, 'The Curious Case of Afghanistan', *Journal of Democracy* 17/2 (2006) pp.104–17.
48. See Andreas Mehler, *Constitutions for Sustainable Peace? A Look at Recent Trends to Overcome Conflicts in Divided Societies by Constitutional Change*, Paper presented at the conference 'Peace Through Institutions: What Works Under Which Conditions – And What Does Not?', Hamburg: GIGA, 13–14 Apr. 2011.
49. Drude Dahlerup (ed.) 'Introduction' in Drude Dahlerup (ed.) *Women, Quotas and Politics* (London and New York, NY: Routledge 2006).
50. See Mala Htun, 'Is Gender like Ethnicity? The Political Representation of Identity Groups', *Perspectives on Politics*, 2/3 (2004) pp.439–58.
51. For example, the UNDP's Centre for Constitutional Dialogue (online at < <http://www.ccd.org.np/new/index.php>>), the main think-tank advising the Assembly in Nepal, highlights the following 'special' issues on its webpage:
 - Women and the Constitution Building Process.

- Indigenous Peoples and the Constitution Building Process.
- Civil Society Organisations in the Constitution Building Process.
- Transition to a Federal Structure and Implementation of the New Constitution.

52. See online at < <http://nepalitimes.com/issue/2011/05/20/StateOfTheState/18228>>.

53. See Mohamad Ali Harissi, 'Iraq Veering towards "Lebanonisation"', *Agence France-Presse* 14 Dec. 2011.

54. 'Still Struggling to Form Government, Iraq Breaks a World Record', *Washington Post* 1 Oct. 2010, p.A11.

55. See Bitter Feud, 'Between Top Iraqi Leaders Stalls Government', *New York Times* 25 Jun. 2011.

56. René Lemarchand, 'Consociationalism and Power Sharing in Africa: Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *African Affairs* 106/422 (2006) p.3.

57. Thomas Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm', *Journal of Democracy* 13/1 (2002) p.10.

58. Vicky Randall and Lars Svåsand, 'Party Institutionalization in New Democracies', *Party Politics* 8/1 (2002) pp.6–29.